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# Ballads

By John Massfield



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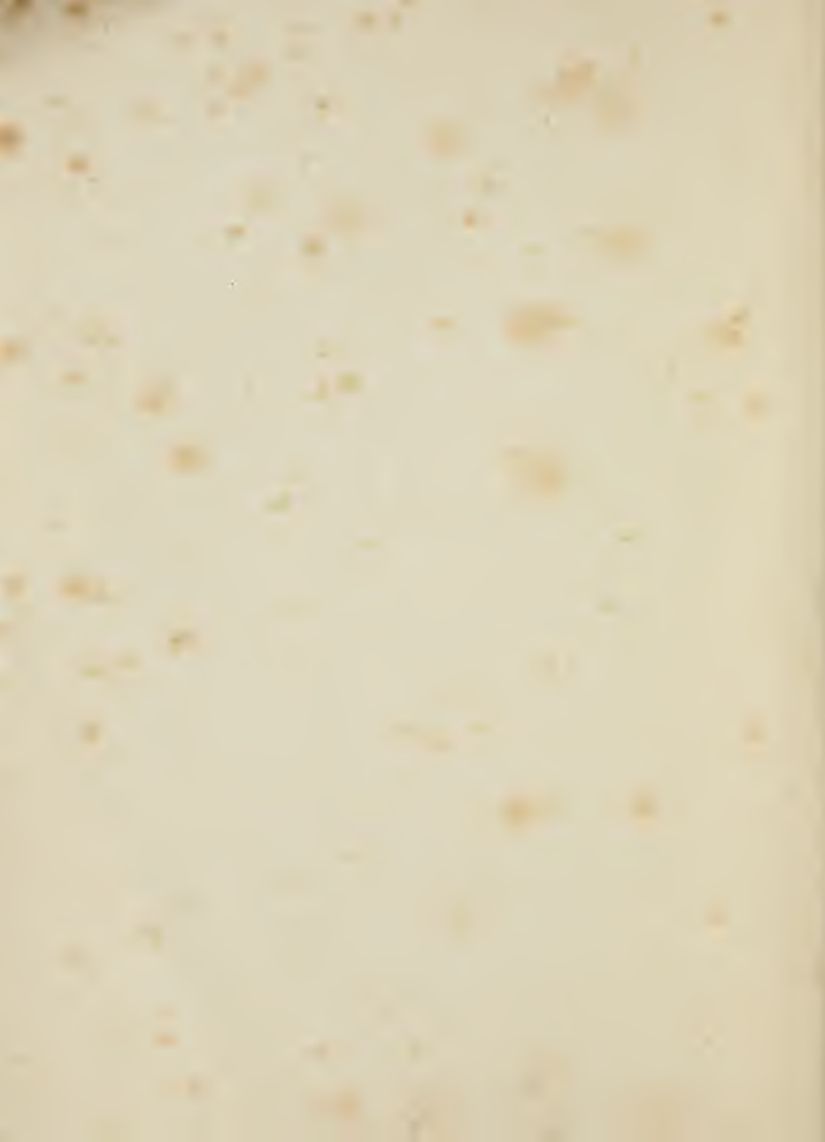
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BALLADS





# BALLADS

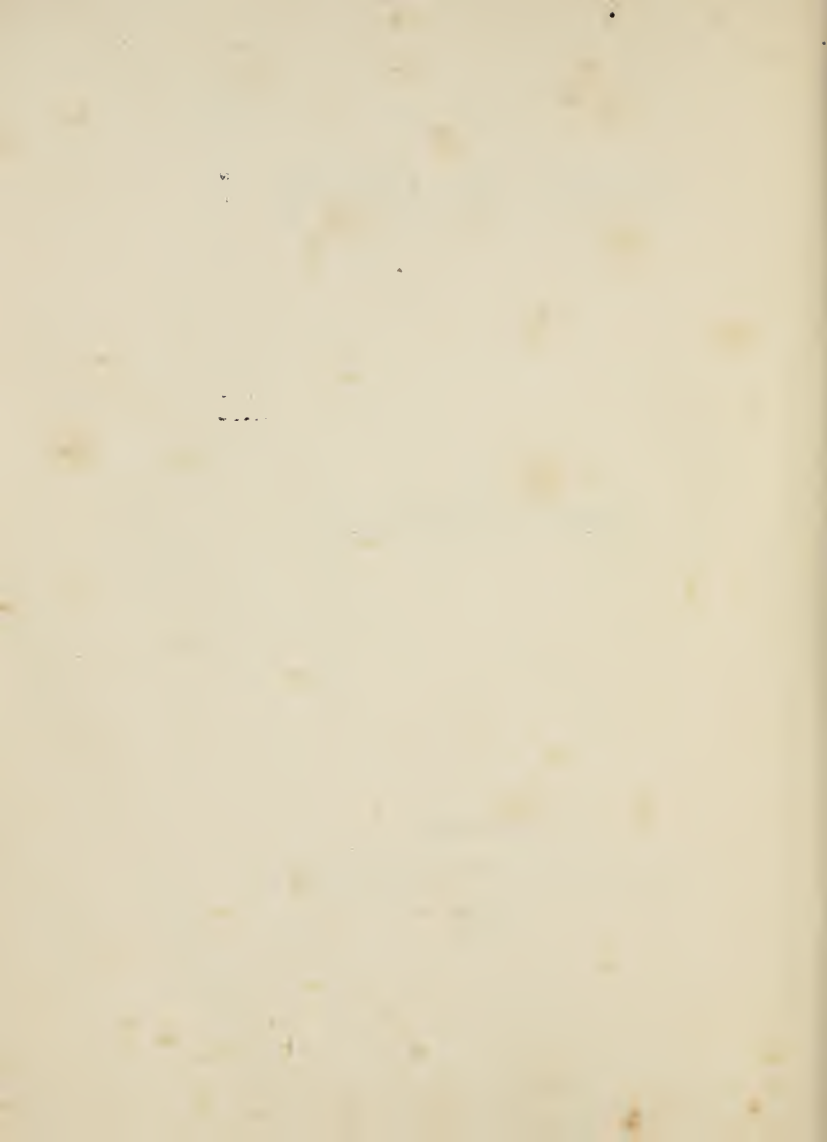
BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

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TO MY WIFE

I thank the Editors of the *Broad Sheet*, *Green Sheaf*, *Pall Mall Magazine*, and *Speaker*, for permission to reprint the Ballads in this volume.

J. M.

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NOTE.—Some of these Ballads will be issued separately with the score of the music proper to them.

J. M.



## The Ballad of Sir Bors

WOULD I could win some quiet and rest, and a  
little ease,

In the cool grey hush of the dusk, in the dim  
green place of the trees,

Where the birds are singing, singing, singing,  
crying aloud

The song of the red, red rose that blossoms  
beyond the seas.

Would I could see it, the rose, when the light  
begins to fail,

And a lone white star in the West is glimmering  
on the mail;

## THE BALLAD OF SIR BORS

The red, red passionate rose of the sacred blood  
of the Christ,  
In the shining chalice of God, the cup of the  
Holy Grail.

The dusk comes gathering grey, and the dark-  
ness dims the West,  
The oxen low to the byre, and all bells ring to  
rest;  
But I ride over the moors, for the dusk still  
bides and waits,  
That brims my soul with the glow of the rose  
that ends the Quest.

My horse is spavined and ribbed, and his bones  
come through his hide,  
My sword is rotten with rust, but I shake the  
reins and ride,



## THE BALLAD OF SIR BORS

For the bright white birds of God that nest in  
the rose have called,  
And never a township now is a town where I  
can bide.

It will happen at last, at dusk, as my horse  
limps down the fell,  
A star will glow like a note God strikes on a  
silver bell,  
And the bright white birds of God will carry  
my soul to Christ,  
And the sight of the Rose, the Rose, will pay  
for the years of hell.

## Spanish Waters

Air—"Sir Harry Lingen's Riding."

SPANISH waters, Spanish waters, you are ringing  
in my ears,

Like a sweet quaint piece of music from the  
grey forgotten years;

Telling tales, and weaving runes, and bringing  
weary thoughts to me

Of the sandy beach at Muertos, where I would  
that I could be.

Oh the sunny beach at Muertos, and the windy  
spit of sand,

Off of which we came to anchor while the ship-  
mates went a-land;

## SPANISH WATERS

Where the blue laguna emptied over snags of  
rotting trees,  
And the golden sunlight quivered on the brilliant  
colibris.

We came to port at Muertos when the dipping  
sun was red,  
And we moored her half-a-mile to sea, to west  
of Nigger Head;  
And before the mist was on the Key, before the  
day was done,  
We put ashore to Muertos with the gold that  
we had won.

We bore it through the marshes in a half-score  
battered chests,  
Sinking, staggering in the quagmire till the lush  
weed touched the breasts,

## SPANISH WATERS

While the slithering feet were squelching in the  
pulp of fallen fruits,  
And the cold and clammy leeches bit and sucked  
us through the boots.

The moon came white and ghostly as we laid  
the treasure down,  
All the spoil of scuttled carracks, all the loot  
of Lima Town.

Copper charms and silver trinkets from the  
chests of perished crews,  
Gold doubloons and double moydores, louis d'ors  
and portagues.

Clumsy yellow-metal earrings from the Indians  
of Brazil,  
Emerald ouches out of Rio, silver bars from  
Guyaquil,

## SPANISH WATERS

Silver cups and polished flagons, censers wrought  
in flowered bronze,  
And the chased enamelled sword hilts of the  
courtly Spanish Dons,

We smoothed the place with mattocks, and we  
took and blazed the tree,  
Which marks you where the gold is hid that  
none will ever see,  
And we laid aboard the brig again, and south  
away we steers,  
Through the loud white surf of Muertos which  
is beating in my ears.

I'm the last alive that knows it. All the rest  
were took and swung  
In chains at Execution Dock, where thieves  
and such are hung,

## SPANISH WATERS

And I go singing, fiddling, old and starved and  
castaway,  
And I know where all the gold is that we won  
with L'Ollonais.

Well, I've had a merry life of it. I'm old and  
nearly blind,  
But the sun-dried swinging shipmates' chains  
are clanking in my mind ;  
And I see in dreams, awhiles, the beach, the  
sun's disc dipping red,  
And the tall brig, under topsails, swaying in  
past Nigger Head.

I'd be glad to step ashore there. Glad to take  
a pick and go  
To the lone blazed coco-palm tree in the place  
no others know,

## SPANISH WATERS

And lift the gold and silver that has mouldered  
there for years

By the loud white surf of Muertos which<sup>is</sup><sub>is</sub>  
beating in my ears.

## Cargoes

QUINQUIREME of Nineveh from distant Ophir,  
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,  
With a cargo of ivory,  
And apes and peacocks,  
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the  
Isthmus,  
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green  
shores,  
With a cargo of diamonds,  
Emeralds, amethysts,  
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.



## CARGOES

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke  
stack,  
Butting through the Channel in the mad March  
days,  
With a cargo of Tyne coal,  
Road-rails, pig-lead,  
Firewood, ironware, and cheap tin trays.

## Captain Stratton's Fancy

Air—"Masfield's Own."

Oh some are fond of red wine, and some are  
fond of white,  
And some are all for dancing by the pale moon-  
light,  
But rum alone's the tippie, and the heart's delight  
Of the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of Spanish wine, and some  
are fond of French,  
And some 'll swallow tay and stuff fit only for a  
wench,  
But I'm for right Jamaica till I roll beneath the  
bench,  
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

## CAPTAIN STRATTON'S FANCY

Oh some are for the lily, and some are for the rose,  
But I am for the sugar-cane that in Jamaica  
grows.

For it's that that makes the bonny drink to  
warm my copper nose,  
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of fiddles, and a song well sung.  
And some are all for music for to lilt upon the  
tongue;

But mouths were made for tankards, and for  
sucking at the bung,  
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of dancing, and some are fond  
of dice,  
And some are all for red lips, and pretty lasses'  
eyes;

## CAPTAIN STRATTON'S FANCY

But a right Jamaica puncheon is a finer prize  
To the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some that's good and godly ones they hold  
that it's a sin,  
To troll the jolly bowl around, and let the dollars  
spin;  
But I'm for toleration, and for drinking at an  
inn,  
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are sad and wretched folk that go in  
silken suits,  
And there's a mort of wicked rogues that live in  
good reposes;  
So I'm for drinking honestly, and dying in my  
boots,  
Like an old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

## News from Whydah

Air—"Gara River."

Oh did you come by Whydah Roads, my tarry  
Buccaneer O?

And did you see the Anna Pink, and whither  
did she steer O?

Away O, Heigho, fal lal lero.

Did you see my fancy man in crimson bom-  
bazino?

With ear-rings and sea-boots the bravest ever  
seen O?

Away O, Heigho, derry down deno.

For the English King's ships caring not a fig O,  
Bringing gold, in the hold, to marry me in Sligo  
Away O, Heigho, ago and igo.

## NEWS FROM WHYDAH

Yes I came by Whydah Roads, my dark Senhora,  
There I saw the Anna Pink but she was gone  
ashore a.

Away O! Heigho, labora et ora.

Wrack and wreck was on her deck, and she was  
full of weed a,  
And poor drowned mariners that made my heart  
to bleed a.

Away O! Heigho, to bleed indeed a.

There I saw your fancy man hanging from a  
tree a,  
Dangling in a running noose, and staring out to  
sea a.

Away O, Heigho,

Away O, Heigho,

Away O, Heigho, and won't you marry me a?

## St. Mary's Bells

Air—"Manzanares."

It's pleasant in Holy Mary  
By San Marie lagoon,  
The bells they chime and jingle  
From dawn to afternoon.  
They rhyme and chime and mingle,  
They pulse and boom and beat,  
And the laughing bells are gentle  
And the mournful bells are sweet.

Oh, who are the men that ring them,  
The bells of San Marie,  
Oh, who but sonsie seamen  
Come in from over sea,

## ST. MARY'S BELLS

And merrily in the belfries  
They rock and sway and hale,  
And send the bells a-jangle,  
And down the lusty ale.

It's pleasant in Holy Mary  
To hear the beaten bells  
Come booming into music,  
Which throbs, and clangs, and swells,  
From sunset till the daybreak,  
From dawn to afternoon.  
In port of Holy Mary  
On San Marie Lagoon.



## London Town

Air—"Bradlow Knoll."

OH London Town 's a fine town, and London  
sights are rare,  
And London ale is right ale, and brisk 's the  
London air,  
And busily goes the world there, but crafty  
grows the mind,  
And London Town of all towns I'm glad to  
leave behind.

Then hey for croft and hop-yard, and hill, and  
field, and pond,  
With Bredon Hill before me and Malvern Hill  
beyond.

## LONDON TOWN

The hawthorn white i' the hedgerow, and all the  
spring's attire  
In the comely land of Teme and Lugg, and Clent  
and Clee, and Wyre.

Oh London girls are brave girls, in silk and  
cloth o' gold,  
And London shops are rare shops, where gallant  
things are sold,  
And bonnily clinks the gold there, but drowsily  
blinks the eye,  
And London Town of all towns I'm glad to  
hurry by.

Then, hey for covert and woodland, and ash and  
elm and oak,  
Tewkesbury inns, and Malvern roofs, and Wor-  
cester chimney smoke,

## LONDON TOWN

The red-felled Hereford cattle a-lowing from  
field and byre,  
And Bradlow Knoll, and Kilbury Camp, and  
Ledbury Church's spire.

Oh London tunes are new tunes, and London  
books are wise,  
And London plays are rare plays, and fine to  
country eyes,  
But craftily fares the knave there, and wickedly  
fares the Jew,  
And London Town of all towns I'm glad to  
hurry through.

So hey for the road, the west road, by mill and  
forge and fold,  
Scent of the fern and song of the lark by brook,  
and field, and wold,

## LONDON TOWN

To the comely folk at the hearth-stone and the  
ale beside the fire,  
In the hearty land, the home land, my land of  
heart's desire.

## The Emigrant

Air—"The Ships in Gara River."

GOING by Daly's shanty I heard the boys  
within

Dancing the Spanish hornpipe to Driscoll's  
violin,

I heard the sea-boots shaking the rough planks  
of the floor,

But I was going westward, I hadn't heart for  
more.

All down the windy village the noise rang in  
my ears,

Old sea boots stamping, shuffling, bringing the  
bitter tears,

## THE EMIGRANT

The old tune piped and quavered, the lilts came  
clear and strong,  
But I was going westward, I couldn't join the  
song.

There were the grey stone houses, the night  
wind blowing keen,  
The hill-sides pale with moonlight, the young  
corn springing green,  
The hearth nooks lit and kindly, with dear  
friends good to see,  
But I was going westward, and the ship waited  
me.

## Port of Holy Peter

Air—"Nancy Lass."

THE blue laguna rocks and quivers,  
Dull gurgling eddies twist and spin,  
The climate does for people's livers,  
It's a nasty place to anchor in  
Is Spanish port,  
Fever port,  
Port of Holy Peter.

The town begins on the sea-beaches,  
And the town's mad with the stinging flies,  
The drinking water's mostly leeches,  
It's a far remove from Paradise

PORT OF HOLY PETER

Is Spanish port,  
Fever port,  
Port of Holy Peter.

There's sand-bagging and throat-slitting,  
And quiet graves in the sea slime,  
Stabbing, of course, and rum-hitting,  
Dirt, and drink, and stink, and crime,  
In Spanish port,  
Fever port,  
Port of Holy Peter.

All the day the wind's blowing,  
From the sick swamp below the hills,  
All the night the plague's growing,  
And the dawn brings the fever chills,  
In Spanish port,  
Fever port,  
Port of Holy Peter.



## PORT OF HOLY PETER

You get a thirst there's no slaking,  
You get the chills and fever-shakes,  
Tongue yellow and head aching,  
And then the sleep that never wakes.

And all the year the heat 's baking,  
The sea rots and the earth quakes,  
In Spanish port,  
Fever port,  
Port of Holy Peter.

## Beauty

I HAVE seen dawn and sunset on moors and  
windy hills,

Coming in solemn beauty like slow old tunes of  
Spain;

I have seen the lady April bringing the daffodils,  
Bringing the springing grass and the soft warm  
April rain.

I have heard the song of the blossoms and the  
old chant of the sea,

And seen strange lands from under the arched  
white sails of ships;

But the loveliest things of beauty God ever has  
showed to me,

Are her voice, and her hair, and eyes, and the  
dear red curve of her lips.

## The Seekers

FRIENDS and loves we have none, nor wealth,  
nor blessed abode,  
But the hope, the burning hope, and the road,  
the lonely road.

Not for us are content, and quiet, and peace of  
mind,  
For we go seeking cities that we shall never  
find.

There is no solace on earth for us—for such as  
we—  
Who search for the hidden beauty that eyes  
may never see.

## THE SEEKERS

Only the road and the dawn, the sun, the wind,  
and the rain,  
And the watch-fire under stars, and sleep, and  
the road again.

We seek the City of God, and the haunt where  
beauty dwells,  
And we find the noisy mart and the sound of  
burial bells.

Never the golden city, where radiant people  
meet,  
But the dolorous town where mourners are going  
about the street.

We travel the dusty road till the light of the day  
is dim,  
And sunset shows us spires away on the world's  
rim.

## THE SEEKERS

We travel from dawn to dusk, till the day is  
past and by,  
Seeking the Holy City beyond the rim of the  
sky.

Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth  
nor blest abode,  
But the hope, the burning hope, and the road,  
the lonely road.

## Hall Sands

[The village of Hall Sands, between Dartmouth and Start Point, in South Devonshire, is imminently threatened by the sea. Its natural breakwater of sand and shingle was removed a few months ago by a Government contractor, and since its removal the sea has encroached upon the foreshore, and is now undermining some of the houses.

The land on which the village stands is beginning to slip and settle. The sea takes a heavy toll of earth at each high tide. The fishermen are in danger of utter ruin, and the first gale from the south-east is likely to sweep the village from its site.]

THE moon is bright on Devon sands,  
The pale moon brings the tide,  
The cold green water's greedy hands  
Are clutching far and wide  
Where the brown nets are dried.

Oh! snaky are the salt green waves  
That wash the scattered shells;  
They come from making sailors' graves

## HALL SANDS

And tolling sunk ships' bells—  
But now their tossing swells  
Are lipping greedy at the stone  
Which props the scattered town.  
They cannot leave the rocks alone,  
They mean to sink and drown  
The wretched cabins down.

The beams are creaking, and the walls  
Are cracking, while the sea  
Lips landward steadily and galls  
Those huts of brick and tree  
Which men's homes used to be.

Lithe, wicked eddies twist and spin  
Where once they dragged the boats.  
The nimble shrimps are nesting in  
The rye-patch—and the throats  
Of sea-snails glut the oats.

## HALL SANDS

It is all falling, slipping swift ;  
The thievish tides intend  
To crumble down and set adrift,  
To eat away, and rend.  
And steal, and make an end.

Soon, when the wind is setting cold  
And sharp from the south-east,  
The great salt water running bold  
Will give the fish a feast,  
And the town will have ceased,

But that its wretched ruins then—  
Though sunken utterly—  
Will show how the brute greed of men  
Helps feed the greedy sea.



## Dawn

THE dawn comes cold: the haystack smokes,

The green twigs crackle in the fire,  
The dew is dripping from the oaks,  
And sleepy men bear milking-yokes  
Slowly towards the cattle-byre.

Down in the town a clock strikes six,

The grey east heaven burns and glows,  
The dew shines on the thatch of ricks,  
A slow old crone comes gathering sticks,  
The red cock in the ox-yard crows.

Beyond the stack where we have lain

The road runs twisted like a snake  
(The white road to the land of Spain),  
The road that we must foot again,  
Though the feet halt and the heart ache.

## Laugh and be Merry

LAUGH and be merry, remember, better the  
world with a song,

Better the world with a blow in the teeth of a  
wrong.

Laugh for the time is brief, a thread the length  
of a span.

Laugh and be proud to belong to the old proud  
pageant of man.

Laugh and be merry : remember, in olden time,  
God made Heaven and Earth for joy He took  
in a rhyme,

Made them, and filled them full with the strong  
red wine of His mirth,

The splendid joy of the stars : the joy of the  
earth.

## LAUGH AND BE MERRY

So we must laugh and drink from the deep blue  
cup of the sky

Join the jubilant song of the great stars sweep-  
ing by,

Laugh, and battle, and work, and drink of the  
wine outpoured

In the dear green earth, the sign of the joy of  
the Lord.

Laugh and be merry together, like brothers akin,  
Guesting awhile in the rooms of a beautiful inn,  
Glad till the dancing stops, and the lilt of the  
music ends.

Laugh till the game is played; and be you  
merry, my friends.

## Blind Man's Vigil

MUMBLIN' under the gallows, hearin' the clank  
o' the chain,

Hearin' the suck o' the sea as the tide goes by  
the stair,

I fiddles a lilt o' tune to the bones o' the men o'  
the Main,

Who dangle, rattle, and dance in the rusty  
chains on air.

Poor old mariners' bones, a mark for cobbles  
and hoys,

As they go about in the Reach when the  
dingy tide 's at flood.

## BLIND MAN'S VIGIL

Bones of Billy's old shipmates, bones o' the  
merry boys,  
Whose faults were dollars and girls, and a too  
quick tick o' the blood.

They wasn't the lads to rest in a patch of  
Christian mould,  
Under a marble slab with a verse o' Scriptor  
to 't.

They asked for liquor, an' fun, an' a friend to  
share the gold,  
An' a dance in hemp at last wi' nothin' but  
air to foot.

I fiddles 'em bits o' tunes, an' ballads, an' songs,  
an' rhymes,  
Of the sort that brought the anchor home, an'  
the yard to the masthead ;

## BLIND MAN'S VIGIL

An' I think they likes to hear, for it makes 'em  
mind the times,

When the blood was hot, an' the throat was  
dry, an' a woman's lips were red.

Fiddlin' under the gallows I mumbles tunes  
an' words

To the danglin', janglin' rags an' bones that  
once were lads I knew;

(An' I think they likes to hear), an' it scares  
away the birds,

From the men who go where the wind blows,  
an' went where the wind blew.

## Roadways

ONE road leads to London,

One road runs to Wales,

My road leads me seawards

To the white dipping sails.

One road leads to the river,

As it goes singing slow ;

My road leads to shipping,

Where the bronzed sailors go.

Leads me, lures me, calls me

To salt green tossing sea ;

A road without earth's road-dust

Is the right road for me.

## ROADWAYS

A wet road heaving, shining,  
And wild with sea-gulls' cries,  
A mad salt sea-wind blowing  
The salt spray in my eyes.

My road calls me, lures me  
West, east, south, and north ;  
Most roads lead men homewards,  
My road leads me forth  
To add more miles to the tally  
Of grey miles left behind,  
In quest of that one beauty  
God put me here to find.



## Midsummer Night

“They tell a tale in the taverns of a white lady riding in the wood each Beltane. They call her Queen Elizabeth, though it is but a changing of the name. It is the lady Dian gone a-masquerading.”—*Samuel Trairon's MS.*

THE perfect disc of the sacred moon  
Through still blue heaven serenely swims,  
And the lone bird's liquid music brims  
The peace of the night with a perfect tune.

This is that holiest night o' the year  
When (the mowers say) may be heard and  
seen  
The ghostly court of the English queen,  
Who rides to harry and hunt the deer.

## MIDSUMMER NIGHT

And the woodland creatures cower awake,  
A strange unrest is on harts and does,  
For the maiden Dian a-hunting goes,  
And the trembling deer are a-foot in the brake.

They start at a shaken leaf: the sound  
Of a dry twig snapped by a squirrel's foot  
Is a nameless dread: and to them the hoot  
Of a mousing owl is the cry of a hound.

Oh soon the forest will ring with cries,  
The dim green coverts will flash: the grass  
Will glow as the radiant hunters pass  
After the quarry with burning eyes.

The hurrying feet will range unstayed  
Of questing goddess and hunted fawn,  
Till the east is grey with the sacred dawn,  
And the red cock wakens the milking maid.

## The Harper's Song

THIS sweetness trembling from the strings

The music of my troublous lute

Hath timed Herodias' Daughter's foot ;

Setting a-clink her ankle-rings

Whenas she danced to feasted kings.

Where gemmed apparel burned and caught

The sunset 'neath the golden dome,

To the dark beauties of old Rome

My sorrowful lute hath haply brought

Sad memories sweet with tender thought.

When night had fallen and lights and fires

Were darkened in the homes of men,

Some sighing echo stirred :—and then

The old cunning wakened from the wires

The old sorrows and the old desires.

### THE HARPER'S SONG

Dead kings in long forgotten lands,  
And all dead beauteous women. Some  
Whose pride imperial hath become  
Old armour resting in the sands,  
And shards of iron in dusty hands,

Have heard my lyre's soft rise and fall  
Go trembling down the paven ways,  
Till every heart was all ablaze—  
Hasty each foot—to obey the call  
To triumph or to funeral.

Could I begin again the slow  
Sweet mournful music filled with tears,  
Surely the old, dead, dusty ears  
Would hear : the old drowsy eyes would glow,  
Old memories come : old hopes and fears,  
And time restore the long ago.

## The Gentle Lady

So beautiful, so dainty-sweet  
So like a lyre's delightful touch—  
A beauty perfect, ripe, complete  
That art's own hand could only smutch  
And nature's self not better much.

So beautiful, so purely wrought,  
Like a fair missal penned with hymns,  
So gentle, so surpassing thought—  
A beauteous soul in lovely limbs,  
A lantern that an angel trims.

## THE GENTLE LADY

So simple-sweet, without a sin  
Like gentle music gently timed,  
Like rhyme-words coming aptly in,  
To round a moonéd poem rhymed  
To tunes the laughing bells have chimed.

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